



EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT  
ALLOWANCE: WORK CAPABILITY  
ASSESSMENT BY HEALTH  
CONDITION AND FUNCTIONAL  
IMPAIRMENT:  
Official Statistics



**October 2011**

**DWP** Department for  
Work and Pensions

# Executive summary

This is the official statistics publication of Work Capability Assessment (WCA) figures relating to Employment and Support Allowance claims (ESA). It contains figures on ESA claims to February 2011 and WCAs to May 2011. Note that outcomes from IB reassessment are not included in this report.

The headline figures are:

For all new ESA Claims from 27th October 2008 to 28th February 2011, the result of the initial WCA is as follows:

- Support Group – 7%
- Work Related Activity Group – 17%
- Fit for Work – 38%
- Claim closed before assessment complete – 36%
- Assessment still in progress – 2%

## Author contact details

Daniel Groves  
Working Age Benefits Division  
Department for Work and Pensions

email: [daniel.groves@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.groves@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)  
Tel: 020 7449 5924

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# 1 List of Tables

All tables can be found at the following link:

[http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa\\_wca/esa\\_wca\\_25102011\\_tables.xls](http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_25102011_tables.xls)

**Table 1: Initial Assessments: ESA on-flows by month of claim start, country/region and result of functional assessment**

**Table 1a: Repeat Assessments: Functional assessment outcomes by month of claim start**

**Table 2: Initial Assessments: Completed assessments by month of assessment and result**

**Table 2a: Repeat Assessments: Completed assessments by month of assessment and result**

**Table 3: Initial Assessments: WCA appeals heard on 'Fit for Work' decision**

**Table 4: Initial Assessments: ESA on-flows by month of claim start and result of initial assessment after the effect of appeals**

**Table 5: Initial Assessments: Support Group by reason (including effect of appeals)**

**Table 6: Initial Assessments: Work Related Activity Group by reason (including effect of appeals)**

**Table 7: Initial Assessments: Result of assessment by ICD10 Condition Group**

**Table 8: Initial Assessments: Points scored by people in the WRAG scoring 15 points or more by functional impairment**

**Table 9: Initial Assessments: People scoring 15 points or more at the WCA by points scored and medical condition – percentages**

## 2 Work Capability Assessment

### 2.1 Summary

2.1.1 Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claims from 27th October 2008. The introduction of ESA for new claimants in October 2008 was accompanied by a new assessment, the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The WCA is based on advice delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) assessment services contractor, Atos Healthcare.

### 2.2 Differences from previous publications

2.2.1 This publication provides the latest available data for ESA claims in Great Britain that are assessed by the WCA. This is an update to statistics previously released in July 2011.

### 2.3 Background

2.3.1 This report presents monthly data on ESA claims and their subsequent WCA outcomes. ESA claimants begin the functional assessment process shortly after starting their claim. Atos Healthcare undertakes an assessment and following the assessment, their recommendation is passed on to DWP to make a final decision on the claimant's ESA status. This will be one of the following:

- Support Group (for those with severe disabilities) – they receive ESA at a higher rate of benefit entitlement overall and exemption from mandatory work-related activity such as engagement with the Work Programme;
- Work Related Activity Group – they receive ESA at a higher rate of benefit than those on JSA and are mandated to engage with work-related activity such as the Work Programme; and
- Fit for Work – the ESA claim is ceased but individuals can ask for a reconsideration or appeal if they disagree with the decision.

- 2.3.2 If someone is found Fit for Work by DWP they are no longer entitled to claim ESA. However, they may ask for a revision and/or they may appeal against the DWP decision. A large proportion of people claiming ESA cease their claim before assessment is complete (for example, if they have a short term health condition) and this is reflected in the figures presented in this paper. A recent DWP research report included a section looking at what happened to a sample of people who left ESA after being found Fit for Work or leaving ESA before completing assessment. These findings have been published and can be on the Departmental website at the link below:

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep762.pdf>

## 2.4 IB Reassessment

- 2.4.1 This report does not include any information about claims and assessments that have been through the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment, including both the trial that ran in Aberdeen and Burnley, and the national roll-out starting from April 2011. More information on progress of the trial can be found on the Departmental website here:

[http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc\\_analysis/2011/ib\\_reassessment.pdf](http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2011/ib_reassessment.pdf)

- 2.4.2 Due to the overall length of the reassessment process information on the entire incapacity benefits reassessment process, including the final outcomes and subsequent destinations of claimants being reassessed, is not yet available. Individual level data are being collected, but it will take time to complete because of the overall length of the reassessment process. The Department plans to publish data on the outcomes of the reassessment process but only once it has been quality assured and is considered robust.

## 2.5 Revised WCA

- 2.5.1 On 28 March 2011, DWP introduced revised criteria for the Work Capability Assessment. These changes were based on the recommendations of a Department-led review of the WCA. Changes included simplifying the language of the criteria, making greater provision for people awaiting courses of chemotherapy and people with certain communication and mental health problems, as well as taking greater account of how an individual has adapted to their condition or disability.
- 2.5.2 Anyone receiving a Limited Capability for Work questionnaire after 14 March 2011 was assessed under the new criteria, while individuals issued with the questionnaire before this date were assessed under the old criteria. This means that between March and June 2011 a small but diminishing number of assessments were conducted using old criteria.

## 2.6 Next Publication

- 2.6.1 The next publication is due in January 2012. Following the Secretary of State's decision to submit this publication for assessment as National Statistics shortly after 1 February 2012, the Department is working with the UK Statistics Authority to consider changes to the presentation of the statistics.

# 3 Work Capability Assessment - Headline Statistics

## 3.1 WCA results for all ESA claims

3.1.1 For all new ESA claims from October 2008 to February 2011, the breakdown of the DWP decision at initial assessment (using all results known by the end of August 2011) is as shown below. These figures are taken from Table 1 in the accompanying spreadsheet; see the list of tables on page 4 for more information.

- Entitled to ESA in the Support Group – 7%
- Entitled to ESA in the Work Related Activity Group – 17%
- Fit for Work – 38%
- Claim closed before assessment complete – 36%
- Assessment still in progress – 2%

## 3.2 WCA results for all completed assessments

3.2.1 For all completed initial assessments (not including assessments still in progress or people who left ESA before completing assessment) to the end of May 2011 the breakdown of the DWP decision at initial assessment is shown below. These figures are taken from Table 2 in the accompanying spreadsheet.

- Entitled to ESA in the Support Group – 11%
- Entitled to ESA in the Work Related Activity Group - 27%
- Fit for Work - 62%

## 3.3 WCA appeals

3.3.1 Of people who made a claim for ESA between October 2008 and August 2010 and who were found Fit for Work at assessment, 39% have had an appeal heard by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to date. The original decision made by DWP has been confirmed for 62% of these appeals heard. These figures are taken from Table 3 in the accompanying spreadsheet.

3.3.2 Table 4 in the accompanying spreadsheet is the same as Table 1 except that results are presented after the effect of appeals against the decision made at the WCA. This effectively increases the number of people entitled to ESA in the Support Group and the Work Related Activity Group and reduces the number of people in the Fit for Work category. The breakdown of initial WCA outcomes including the effect of appeals heard to date is shown below:



- Entitled to ESA in the Support Group – 7%
- Entitled to ESA in the Work Related Activity Group – 22%
- Fit for Work – 33%
- Claim closed before assessment complete – 36%
- Assessment still in progress – 2%

## 3.4 Repeat assessments

3.4.1 A repeat WCA is the second or subsequent assessment undergone on a continuous ESA claim. The timing of repeat WCAs is determined by the prognosis that is set at the previous assessment. Some claims may have had two or more repeat assessments and therefore each of the outcomes will be recorded in the tables.

3.4.2 For all WCA repeat assessments for ESA claims from October 2008 to February 2011, the breakdown of the DWP decision (using all results known by the end of August 2011) is as shown below. These figures are taken from Table 1a in the accompanying spreadsheet. Totals do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Entitled to ESA in the Support Group - 12%
- Entitled to ESA in the Work Related Activity Group - 37%
- Fit for Work - 25%
- Claim closed before assessment complete - 12%
- Assessment still in progress - 15%

3.4.3 For all repeat assessments completed by May 2011, excluding cases closed before the repeat assessment, the breakdown of the DWP decision is as shown below. These figures are taken from Table 2a in the accompanying spreadsheet. Totals do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- Entitled to ESA in the Support Group – 14%
- Entitled to ESA in the Work Related Activity Group – 54%
- Fit for Work – 33%

# 4 Health Condition and Functional Impairment

## 4.1 Summary

- 4.1.1 This section presents information relating specifically to the health condition of the people making a claim for ESA and the reason Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) or Support Group (SG) status was awarded (where applicable).
- 4.1.2 In principle, the functional impairment is the reason ESA entitlement is granted after assessment and the health condition is the main health condition recorded at the start of the ESA claim.
- 4.1.3 Health Condition breakdowns are based on the internationally recognised ICD 10 codes (International Classification of Diseases)<sup>1</sup>.

## 4.2 Summary statistics

4.2.1 For all new ESA claims from October 2008 to February 2011, the breakdown of the SG by reason (as recorded at assessment) is as shown below. These figures are taken from Table 5 in the accompanying spreadsheet; see the list of tables on page 4 for more information.

- Chemotherapy – 15%
- Physical or Mental Health Risk – 23%
- Pregnancy Risk – 1%
- Severe Functional Disability – 36%
- Terminally ill – 9%
- Other – 16%

4.2.2 For all new ESA claims from October 2008 to February 2011, the breakdown of the WRAG by reason is as shown below. These figures are taken from Table 6 in the accompanying spreadsheet. Totals do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

- 15 Points or more at WCA – 60%
- Medical reasons – 5%
- Clerical assessment – 3%
- After appeal – 21%
- At reconsideration – 10%

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/>

4.2.3 Table 7 in the accompanying spreadsheet breaks down all ESA assessment outcomes by the internationally recognised ICD 10 health condition groups.

4.2.4 For all new ESA claims from October 2008 to February 2011, the breakdown of those in the WRAG scoring 15 points or more by functional impairment is as shown below. Note percentages total more than 100% as people often score points in more than one category. These figures are taken from Tables 8 and 9 in the accompanying spreadsheet. Table 8 presents them by month of claim start and table 9 presents them by ICD 10 health condition group.

- Lower Limb – 49%
- Upper Limb – 9%
- Sensory – 7%
- Continence – 4%
- Consciousness – 6%
- Understanding and Focus – 31%
- Adapting to change – 40%
- Social Interaction – 22%

## 4.3 Reasons for placement in the Support Group

4.3.1 People who are placed in the Support Group after assessment will usually have the reason they have been put in the Support Group recorded, which will be either:

- Support Group - Chemotherapy
- Support Group - Physical or Mental Health Risk
- Support Group - Pregnancy Risk
- Support Group - Severe Functional Disability
- Support Group - Terminally Ill

4.3.2 Section 5.2 provides more detail on what these reasons mean.

4.3.3 For some people the reason they have been placed in the Support Group is not recorded in the database. They are categorised as Support Group – other category. This group includes:

- **Clerical assessments** - where Atos recommendation is recorded clerically and Support Group Status can only be determined from the Jobcentre Plus Decision Maker (JCP DM) decision, but no more detail is available;
- **At reconsideration** - in a small number of cases the JCP DM may determine that people should qualify for the SG when the Atos recommendation was Fit for Work or WRAG. Or the case may have been returned to Atos for reconsideration and subsequently changed –

note that as reconsiderations are only recorded clerically we can only infer this has occurred via the JCP DM decision;

- **After appeal** – again, in a small number of cases, people who move to the Support Group from Fit for Work or WRAG after a successful appeal.

## 4.4 Reasons for placement in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)

4.4.1 People are typically assessed as in the WRAG because they score 15 points or more at the face-to-face WCA. However, the full list of determinants includes:

- **WRAG – 15 points or more at the face-to-face WCA:** applies where someone attends the face-to-face assessment, scores 15 points or more and qualifies for the WRAG;
- **WRAG – medical reasons:** this combines people who are placed in the WRAG due to falling into the Non-Functional Descriptor or the WCA Treat as Limited Capability to Work category (see section 5.3 for details);
- **WRAG - clerical assessment:** where the Atos recommendation is recorded clerically and the WRAG Status can only be determined from the JCP DM decision, but no more detail is available;
- **WRAG - at reconsideration:** in a small number of cases the JCP DM may determine that people should qualify for the WRAG when the Atos recommendation was Fit for Work. Or the case may have been returned to Atos for reconsideration and subsequently changed – note that as reconsiderations are only recorded clerically we can only infer this has occurred via the JCP DM decision;
- **WRAG - after appeal:** people who move to the WRAG from Fit for Work after a successful appeal. Note that people found Fit for Work who are in the process of appealing remain in the Fit for Work category (for the purpose of this breakdown) until their appeal is heard.

## 4.5 Functional Impairment breakdowns

- 4.5.1 Functional Impairment information is taken from points scored at the face-to-face work capability assessment. For people scoring 15 points or more at the face-to-face WCA and who are placed in the WRAG, the functional impairment is the basis for entitlement to ESA.
- 4.5.2 Section 5.3 provides further information on what activities the functional descriptors relate to.

## 4.6 Health Condition breakdowns

- 4.6.1 Medical information is predominantly taken from the information recorded on the medical certificate provided by the GP when someone first makes a claim for ESA. It is based on the primary condition of the person claiming and represents what their GP considers to be the main reason the person cannot work at that time.
- 4.6.2 In 2010, this information was transferred to central administrative databases for all claims still live in November 2009 and new claims thereafter. For some claims that closed before November 2009 we have used other sources to determine medical condition such as that recorded at the WCA or that recorded by Jobcentre Plus at first contact. However, in some cases the information is missing, particularly for ESA claims that closed before November 2009.
- 4.6.3 Note that a decision on entitlement to ESA is not based on the condition, or conditions, a person has. Instead, the department assesses the effects of that condition or conditions on the individual. So the Work Capability Assessment looks at someone's functional ability to carry out activities which are important for work, like getting around, picking things up, learning new tasks or social engagement. For example, an individual will not qualify for ESA on the basis that they have arthritis, but they might qualify because they cannot hold a pen or use a keyboard and mouse.

# 5 Health Condition and Functional Impairment Categories

5.1.1 Below is a more detailed explanation of the Support Group breakdown, the functional impairment breakdown, the non-functional descriptors and WCA deferred categories.

## 5.2 Support Group

5.2.1 In most cases the reason for being placed in the Support Group is recorded at assessment. The following provides a more detailed description of the breakdowns in Table 5:

- **Chemotherapy** – people receiving certain types of chemotherapy automatically qualify for the support group;
- **Physical or Mental Health Risk** – the regulations (see link below) allow that in ‘exceptional circumstances’ a person may be entitled to ESA and put into the support group if there would be ‘serious risk to the mental or physical health of any person’ if the claimant were to be found Fit for Work;
- **Pregnancy Risk** – if a woman is pregnant and there is a serious risk to her health or the health of her unborn child if she works;
- **Severe functional disability** – if the claimant meets the functional criteria, covering physical and mental capacity, laid out in the legislation (see link below);
- **Terminally ill** – someone diagnosed as terminally ill with a prognosis of 6 months or less.

5.2.2 The link below is to The Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008. Part 6 gives a full description of how people can qualify for the Support Group:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/794/contents/made?view=plain>

## 5.3 Functional Impairment

5.3.1 Below is a more detailed description of the functional impairment categories in which people will score points if they score 15 points or more at the face-to-face WCA. They are split between Physical and Mental, cognitive and intellectual functions:

### Physical Functions

- **Lower limb** – physical functions such as ability to walk, stand, sit and bend.
- **Upper Limb** – physical functions such as ability to reach, pick up and manual dexterity.
- **Sensory** – functions such as speech, hearing and vision.
- **Continence** – functions relating to control over the bladder and bowel.
- **Consciousness** – functions relating to involuntary loss of consciousness.

### Mental, cognitive and intellectual functions

- **Understanding and focus** – ability to learn and comprehend, hazard awareness, memory and concentration, and initiating and executing tasks. For example, these descriptors might include someone with a learning disability or someone with dementia.
- **Adapting to change** – ability to cope with changes to routine, to get about and to cope with social situations. These are the sort of challenges someone with autism might face.
- **Social Interaction** – ability to deal with other people. These are the sort of challenges someone with a psychotic condition might face.

5.3.2 The link below provides further information on the Work Capability Assessment and includes a document explaining the functional impairments in further detail:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/DG\\_172012](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/esa/DG_172012)

### Non-Functional Descriptors

5.3.3 Customers will be treated as having limited capability for work and placed in the WRAG if they are:

- suffering from a life-threatening disease in relation to which:
  - there is medical evidence that the disease is uncontrollable, or uncontrolled, by a recognised therapeutic procedure, and

- in the case of a disease that is uncontrolled, there is a reasonable cause for it not to be controlled by a recognised therapeutic procedure.

5.3.4 Customers can be treated as having limited capability for work or as limited capability for work and work related activity (and placed in the WRAG or Support Group respectively, based on the evidence available to the JCP DM) if they are:

- suffering from some specific disease or bodily or mental disablement and, by reasons of such disease or disablement, there would be a substantial risk to the mental or physical health of any person if they were found not to have limited capability for work.

### **Treat as Limited Capability for Work or Work Related Activity**

5.3.5 Customers will be treated as having limited capability for work and placed in the WRAG if they are:

- An in-patient in a hospital or similar institution undergoing medical or other treatment ;
- Recovering from treatment as an in-patient;
- During a period of confinement for pregnancy;
- Pregnant and in receipt of Maternity Allowance with an ESA top-up;
- Undergoing regular treatment - this means a customer receiving:
  - regular weekly treatment by way of haemodialysis for chronic renal failure;
  - treatment by way of plasmapheresis or by way of radiotherapy;
  - regular weekly treatment by way of total parenteral nutrition for gross impairment of enteric function.

5.3.6 Customers can be treated as having limited capability for work or as limited capability for work and work related activity (and placed in the WRAG or Support Group respectively, based on the evidence available to the JCP DM) if they are:

- Pregnant where there is a risk of harm to the mother and/or child.

5.3.7 Customers will be treated as having limited capability for work and work related activity and placed in the Support Group if they are:

- Receiving treatment by way of intravenous, intraperitoneal or intrathecal chemotherapy; or
- Recovering from intravenous, intraperitoneal or intrathecal chemotherapy treatment.



5.3.8 The link below is to The Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008. Part 5 gives a full description of how people can qualify for the Work Related Activity Group:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/794/contents/made?view=plain>

# 6 Technical Notes

## 6.1 Rounding

6.1.1 All caseload figures have been rounded to the nearest 100 and percentages to the nearest percentage point. As a result, summing the columns or rows in a table may not add up exactly to the totals shown.

## 6.2 Source Data

6.2.1 The data presented in this publication combines three main data sources:

- benefit claims data held by the Department for Work and Pensions covering new ESA claims that started between October 2008 and February 2011;
- functional assessment data sourced from Atos Healthcare covering assessments completed up to May 2011; and
- appeals data sourced from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service covering appeals heard up to August 2011 (and which link to ESA claims up to the end of August 2010). Note that data from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service does not record the reason for appeal and we must infer this from the original JCP DM decision. This is typically a Fit for Work decision.